

PROFILE 2005 A LETTER FROM HOME



THE MERIDIAN STAR

RELIGION & EDUCATION

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'God has a mission for me'



Bubby Johnston is vice president for public information at East Central Community College in Decatur, where he has worked since 1987. He is a former editor of *The Scott County Times in Forest*, a weekly newspaper previously owned by his late father, Erle Johnston.

His story is about Sgt. Kelly Cluff of Hickory, a computer network technology instructor at ECCC and a sergeant in the U.S. Marine Corps Reserve.

Kelly is a member of Echo Battery, 2nd Battalion, 14th Marines, headquartered in Jackson. The unit was activated Jan. 4, and Kelly left Jan. 7 for training in California. He is scheduled to arrive in Iraq in early March.

"I admire him for his positive attitude," Bubby said. "I have a great deal of respect for Kelly, as well as all the men and women serving our country."

Bubby himself has two nephews in the U.S. Army National Guard. One recently returned from Kuwait, and the other is serving in Iraq now.



Johnston

By Bubby Johnston
special to The star

Sgt. Kelly Cluff of the U.S. Marine Corps Reserve says his unit's deployment to Iraq "is not a negative thing."

In fact, before he left in January, the East Central Community College computer network technology instructor said he was looking forward to serving his country in Operation Iraqi Freedom.

"As a Christian, I believe that God has a mission for me and my family," Cluff said.

"I do not see going to Iraq as a negative thing. I view my mission as an opportunity to experience a foreign country, new customs, a different language, the Iraqi people — especially the Iraqi children — and to bond with my fellow Marines."

"I believe that God has a different mission for me. As a Sunday school teacher and educational instructor, what better way to experience a very different culture from ours than doing so by also serving my country? I have the chance to learn and experience something new that most people do not have the opportunity to experience."

Even so, being away from his family for a year or more will take a toll.

"It will be difficult, for sure, to be away from my family for such a long period of time. I am very blessed with the family I have. God sent three miracles to me — my wife, the former Carla Jacome, and my two daughters, Emily, 11, and Katherine, 10. I love them very much and will do anything to keep them safe," Cluff said.

"My girls, as I call them, know what I have to do and they accept that by sacrificing their own needs so Daddy can help other kids in Iraq."

The girls knew Cluff might have to serve the United States in dangerous missions. They knew he might have to go to Iraq.

"But they also know that I'm proud to represent my country in a military branch I feel close to. Soldiers in all military branches have sacrificed their lives for the United States and for other foreign countries for the cause of freedom," Cluff said.

"We, as American people, tend to forget about the sacrifices on a daily basis. We take it for granted that we can walk, talk and do things without having a suppressive government watching us all the time."

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U.S. MARINE CORPS RESERVE

Kelly Cluff and his family moved from Anchorage, Alaska, to Newton, Miss., in 1998. He started taking classes at East Central Community College, and joined the U.S. Marine Corps Reserve during his sophomore year. Cluff graduated in 2001, and started his own computer consulting firm in 2003 — the same year he went to work as an instructor at ECCC.

PHOTO BY PAULA MERRITT / THE MERIDIAN STAR

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FLIGHT SIMULATOR

Senior Master Sgt. Rick Robinson of the 186th Air Refueling Wing of the Mississippi Air National Guard demonstrates a KC-135R flight simulator at Key Field. It is one of only four flight simulators of its kind. Air National Guard, Air Force Reserve and active duty personnel are trained in the simulator.

186th ARW: The spirit dates back 70 years

By Steve Gillespie
staff writer

Meridian is the smallest community in the United States to support an Air National Guard flying wing — the 186th Air Refueling Wing.

The wing is made up of about 1,050 traditional Guard members and more than 400 full-time men and women, including active Guard, federal technicians, state employees and civilian contractors.

About half of the people in the wing live in Lauderdale County.

The 186th ARW operates, maintains and supports KC-135R aircraft used to provide air-to-air refueling, and cargo and passenger support to missions of the U.S. Air Force.

The wing also operates counterdrug aircraft, providing nationwide support to law enforcement.

The 186th ARW participates in frequent joint operations with Naval Air Station Meridian and Columbus Air Force Base, and it helps the Meridian Airport Authority with security measures and runway and taxiway repairs.

The 186th ARW hosts presidential support aircraft several times a year — providing security, fuel and other support.

The home of the 186th, Key Field, is the birthplace of air-to-air refueling.

At 12:32 p.m. on June 4, 1935, brothers

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